World's Greatest **Short Stories** No. VII.

THE STORY OF RICHARD DOUBLEDICK



By CHARLES DICKENS

Twenty-four famous authors were asked recently to name the best short story in the English language. Mary Stewart Cutting named "The Story of Richard Doubledick," by Charles Dickens, as her selection for this high honor in the world of fiction.



MARY STEWART CUTTING

CHARLES DICKENS

PART I. N the year 1799 a relative of mine came limping down on foot to this town of Chatham. My relative came to Chatham to enlist in a cavalry regiment if a cavalry regiment would have him; if not, to take King George's shilling from any corporal or sergeant who would put a bunch of ribbons in his hat. His object was to get shot, but he thought he might as well ride to his death as be at the trouble of walking. My relative's Christian name was

Richard, but he was better known as Dick. He dropped his own surname on the road down and took up that of Doubledick. He was passed as Richard Doubledick, age twenty-two, height five foot ten, native place Exmouth. which he had never been near in his life. There was no cavairy in Chatham when he limped over the bridge so he enlisted into a regiment of the line and was glad to get drunk and forget all about it.

You are to know that this relative of His heart was in the right place, but it was sealed up. He had been betrothed to a good and beautiful girl whom he had loved better than she or perhans even he-believed, but in an evil hour he had given her cause to say to marry another man. I will live single for your sake, but Mary Marshall's lips"-her name was Mary Marshall-"never address another word to you on earth! Go, Richard! Heaven for-This finished him. This brought him down to Chatham. This made him Private Richard Double-

dick, with a determination to be shot. There was not a more dissipated and reckless soldler in Chatham barracks in the year 1709 than Private Richard Doubledick. He associated with the dregs of every regiment, he was as seldom sober as he could be and was constantly under punishment. It became clear to the whole barracks that Private Richard Doubledick would very soon be flogged.

Now the captain of Richard Doubledick's company was a young gentleman not above five years his senior. whose eyes had an expression in them which affected Private Richard Douedick in a very remarkable way. They were bright, handsome, dark eyes -what are called laughing eyes generally, and, when serious, rather steady than severe-but they were the only ones now left in his narrowed world that Private Richard Doubledick could Hold your course unchanged a little not stand. Unabashed by evil report longer and you know what must hapa moment, and he felt ashamed. He those tears could bear those marks." could not so much as salute Captain Taunton in the street like any other shivering voice said Private Richard officer. He was reproached and con- Doubledick. fused, troubled by the mere possibility some dark, bright eyes.

Captain Taunton's quarters. In the through a whole regiment, through a stale and squalid state of a man just whole army, through a whole country? out of the Black Hole, he had less Yurn while you may yet retrieve the fancy than ever for being seen by the past and try." captain, but he was not so mad yet as went up to the terrace overlooking the heart. parade ground, where the officers' quarters were, twisting and breaking in his watchful and a faithful one." hands as he went along a bit of the furniture of the Black Hole.

"Come in" cried the captain when he knocked with his knuckles at the light of the dark, bright eyes an aldoor. Private Richard Doubledick pull- tered man. ed off his cap, took a step forward and felt very conscious that he stood in in Egypt, in Italy, in Germany-where the light of the dark, bright eyes.

in his mouth and was gradually doubling it up into his windpipe and choking himself.

you know where you are going to?"

"Yes," returned the captain, "And than Corporal Richard Doubledick.

Private Richard Doubledick turned the straw of the Black Hole in his mouth and made a miserable salute of

"Doubledick," said the captain, "since of men that wherever Captain Taun-

I entered his majesty's service, a boy of seventeer, I have been pained to see many men of promise going that road, but I have never been so pained to see a man determined to make the shameful tourney as I have been ever since you joined the regiment, to see

Private Richard Doubledick began to find a film stealing over the floor at which he looked, also to find the legs of the captain's breakfast table turning crooked, as if he saw them through water.

"I am only a common soldier, sir." said he. "It signifies very little what

such a poor brute comes to." "You are a map." returned the captain, with grave indignation, "of education and superior advantages and if you say that meaning what you say. you have sunk lower than I had believed. How low that must be I leave here with half a shoe to his dusty feet. you to consider, knowing what I know of your disgrace and seeing what I see.

"I hope to get shot soon, sir," said Private Richard Doubledick, "and then mine had gone wrong and run wild. the regiment and the world together will be rid of me."

The legs of the table were becoming very crooked. Doubledick, looking up to steady his vision, met the eves that had so strong an influence over him. He put his hand before his own eyes. him solemnly: "Richard, I will never and the breast of his disgrace jacket swelled as if it would fly asunder.

"I would rather." said the young captain, "see this in you. Doubledick, than I would see 5.000 guineas counted out upon this table for a gift to my good mother. Have you a mother?"

"I am thankful to say she is dead.

"If your praises," returned the captain. "were sounded from mouth to mouth through the whole regiment. through the whole army, through the whole country, you would wish she had lived to say, with pride and joy. 'He is my son!'

"Spare me, sir," said Doubledick. "She would never have heard any good of me. She would never have had any pride and joy in owning herself my mother. Love and compassion she might have had, and would have always had. I know, but not-spare me. sir! I am a broken wretch, quite at | face over on the supporting arm as if your mercy!" And he turned his face | for rest. died. with his hand upon the ploring hand.

"My friend"- began the captain. "God bless you, sir!" sobbed Private

Richard Doubledick. "You are at the crisis of your fate. and punishment, defiant of everything pen. I know even better than you can else and everybody else, he had but to imagine, that, after that has happened, know that those eyes looked at him for you are lost. No man who could shed

"I fully believe it. sir." in a low.

"But a man in any station can do of the captain's looking at him. In his his duty," said the young captain, "and worst moments he would rather turn in doing it can earn his own respect back and go any distance out of the even if his case should be so very unway than encounter those two hand fortunate and so very rare that he can earn no other man's. A common soi One day, when Private Richard Dou- dier, poor brute though you called him bledick came out of the Black Hole. just now, has this advantage in the where he had been passing the last stormy times we live in, that he aleight and forty hours and in which re- ways does his duty before a host of treat he spent a good deal of his time. sympathizing witnesses. Do you doubt he was ordered to betake himself to that he may so do it as to be extolled

"I will. I ask for only one witness. to disobey orders, and consequently sir," cried Richard, with a bursting

"I understand you. I will be

I have heard from Private Richard straw that had formed the decorative Doubledick's own lips that he dropped down upon his knee, kissed that officer's hand, arose and went out of the

In that year, 1799, the French were not? Napoleon Bonaparte had like-There was a slight pause. Private wise begun to stir against us in India. Richard Doubledlek had put the straw and most men could read the signs of the great troubles that were coming on. In the very next year, when we formed an alliance with Austria "Doubledick," said the captain, "do against him, Captain Taunton's regiment was on service in India. And "To the devil, sir." faltered Double there was not a finer noncommissioned officer in it-no, nor in the whole line-

> In 1801 the Indian army were on the coast of Egypt. Next year was the year of the proclamation of the short peace, and they were recalled. It had then become well known to thousands

there, close to him, ever at his side, firm as a rock, true as the sun and brave as Mars, would be certain to be found while life beats in their hearts that famous soldier, Sergeant Richard

Eighteen hundred and five, besides being the great year of afalgar, was a year of hard fighting in India. That year saw such wonders done by a sergeant major who cut his way single banded through a solid mass of men. recovered the colors of his regiment. which had been seized from the hand of a poor boy shot through the heart. and rescued his wounded captain, who was down and in a very jungle of horses' hoofs and sabers-saw such wonders done, I say, by this brave sergeant major that he was specially made the bearer of the colors he had won, and Ensign Richard Doubledick had risen from the ranks.

Sorely cut up in every battle, but alvays re-enforced by the bravest of men -for the fame of tollowing the old colors, shot through and through, which Ensign Richard Doubledick had saved. inspired all breasts-this regiment fought its way through the peninsular war up to the investment of Badajos in 1812. Again and again it had been cheered through the British ranks until the tears had sprung into men's eyes at the mere hearing of the mighty British voice so exultant in their valor. and there was not a drummer boy but knew the legend that wherever the two friends, Major Taunton, with the dark, bright eyes, and Ensign Richard Doubledick, who was devoted to him. were seen to go, there the boldest spirits in the English army became wild to follow.

One day at Badalos-not in the great storming, but in repelling a hot sally of the besleged upon our men at work in the trenches, who had given waythe two officers found themselves running forward, face to face, against a party of French infantry, who made stand. There was an officer at their head encouraging his men-a coursgeous, handsome, gallant officer of five and thirty, whom Doubledick saw hurriedly, almost momentarily, but saw well. He particularly noticed this officer waving his sword and rallying his men with an eager and excited cry when they fired in obedience to ges ture and Major Taunton dropped.

It was over in ten minutes more and Doubledick returned to the spot where he had laid the best friend man ever had on a coat spread upon the wet clay. Major Taunton's uniform was opened at the breast and on his shirt were three little spots of blood. "Dear Doubledick," said be, "I am

dying." "For the love of heaven, no!" exclaimed the other, kneeling down beside him and passing his arm round his neck to raise his head. "Taunton! My preserver, my guardian angel, my witness! Dearest, truest, kindest of human beings! Taunton! For God's

sake! The bright, dark eyes-so very, very dark now in the pale face-smiled upon him, and the hand he had kissed thirteen years ago laid itself fondly on his breast.

"Write to my mother. You will see home again. Tell her how we became friends. It will comfort her, as it comforts me.

He spoke no more, but faintly signed for a moment towards his hair as it fluttered in the wind. The ensign understood him. He smiled again when he saw that and, gently turning his No dry eye looked on Ensign Richard Doubledick that melancholy day. He buried his friend on the field and became a lone, bereaved man. Beyond his duty he appeared to have but two remaining cares in life-one, to pre-

serve the little packet of hair he was to give Taunton's mother; the other, to encounter that French officer who had rallied the men under whose fire Taunton fell. A new legend now began to circulate among our troops, and it was that when he and the French officer came face to face once more there would be weeping in France.

The war went on, and through it went the exact picture of the French officer on the one side and the bodily reality upon the other, until the battle of Toulouse was fought. In the returns sent home appeared these words: "Severely wounded, but not dangerous-

ly. Lieutenant Richard Doubledick " At midsummer time in the year 1814 Lieutenant Richard Doubledick, now a browned soldler seven and thirty years of age, came home to England invalided. He brought the bair with him. Aear his heart. Many a French officer had he seen since that day; many a dreadful night, in searching with men and lanterns for his wounded, had he relieved French officers lying disabled. but the mental picture and the reality had never come together.

Though he was weak and suffered pain, he lost not an hour in getting down to Frome, in Somersetshire, where Taunton's mother lived. In the sweet, compassionate words that naturally present themselves to the mind tonight. "he was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow."

It was a Sunday evening, and the lady sat at her quiet garden window reading the Bible; reading to herself in a trembling voice that very passage in it, as I have heard him tell. He heard the words, "Young man, I say unto thee arise"

He had to pass the window, and the bright, dark eyes of his debased time senied to look at him. Her heart told her who he was; she came to the door quickly and fell upon his neck. "He saved me from ruin, made me a

human creature, won me from infamy and stome. O God, forever bless him As he will, he will!"

"He will!" the lady answered. "I

snow he is in heaven!" Then she piteously cried, "But, oh, my darling boy,

my darling boy!" Never from the hour when Private Richard Doubledick enlisted at Chatham had the private, corporal, sergeant, sergeant major, ensign or lieutenant breathed his right name, or the name of Mary Marshall, or a word of the story of his life, into any ear ex- lay on her bosom. cept his reclaimer's.

But that night, remembering the words he had cherished for two years. lips that speak. I have another name." "Tell her how we became friends. It will comfort her as it comforts me" he related e crything. It gradually seemed to him as if in his maturity he had recovered a mother. It gradually seemed to her as if in her bereavement she had found a son. During his stay in England, the quiet garden into which he had slowly and painfully crept a stranger, became the boundary of his home. When he was able to join his regiment in the spring he left the garden thinking was this indeed the first time he had ever turned his face toward the old colors with a woman's blessing!

He followed them-so ragged, so scarred and pierced now, that they would scarcely hold together-to Quatre Bras and Ligny. He stood beside them in an awful stillness of many men. shadowy through the mist and drizzle of a wet June forenoon, on the field of Waterloo. And down to that hour the picture in his mind of the French officer had never been compared with the reality.

The famous regiment was in action early in the battle and received its first check in many an eventful year, when he was seen to fall. But it swept on to avenge him and left behind it no such creature in the world of consciousness as Lieutenant Richard Dou-

Through pits of mire and pools of rain, along deep ditches, once roads. that were pounded and ploughed to pieces by artillery, heavy wagons. tramp of men and horses and the struggle of every wheeled thing that could carry wounded soldiers; tolted among the dving and dead, so disfigured by blood and mud as to be hardly recognizable for humanity; undisturbed by the monning of men and the shricks of borses, which, newly taken from the peaceful pursuits of life, could not endure the sight of the stragglers lying by the wayside, never to resume their tollsome journey; dead as to any sentient life that was in it, and yet alivethe form that had been Lieutenant Richard Doubledick, with whose praises England rang, was conveyed to Brussels. There it was tenderly laid down in hospital, and there it lay. week after week, through the long bright summer days, until the barvest, spared by war, had ripened and was

PART II.

gathered in.

VER and over again the sun rose and sat upon the crowded city; over and over again the moonlight nights were quiet on the plains of Waterloo; and all that time was a blank to what had been Richard Doubledick.

Slowly laboring at last through a long, heavy dream of confused time and place, presenting faint glimpses of army surgeons whom he knew and of faces that had been familiar to his youth-dearest and kindest among them Mary Marshall's, with a solicitude upon it more like reality than anything he could discern-Lieutenant Richard Doubledick came back to life -to the beautiful life of a calm autumn evening sunset, to the peaceful life of dow standing open, a balcony beyond in which were moving leaves and sweet smelling flowers; beyond, again, the clear sky, with the sun full in his sight, pouring its golden radiance on

It was so tranquil and so lovely that he thought he had passed into another world. And he said in a faint voice. "Taunton, are you near me?" A face bent over him-not his, his

mother's. "I came to nurse you. We have nursed you many weeks. You were

moved here long ago. Do you remember nothing?" "Nothing."

The lady kissed his cheek and held his hand, soothing him. "Where is the regiment? What has

happened? Let me call you mother. What has happened, mother?" "A great victory, dear. The war is over, and the regiment was the bravest

in the field." His eyes kindled his line trembled he sobbed, and the tears ran down his face. He was very weak-too weak to move his hand.

"Was it dark just now?" he asked presently.

"It was only dark to me? Some thing passed away, like a black shadow. But as it went and the sun-oh. the blessed sun, how beautiful it is!touched my face I thought I saw light white cloud pass out at the door. Was there nothing that went out?" She shook her head, and in a little while he fell asleep, she still holding

his hand and soothing him. From that time he recovered-slowly. for he had been desperately wounded in the head and had been shot in the body, but making some little advance every day.

One day he awoke out of a sleep refreshed and asked her to read to him. But the curtain of the bed, softening the light, which she always drew back when he awoke that she might see him from her table at the bedside where she sat at work, was held undrawn. and a woman's voice spoke, which was

not bers. "Can you bear to see a stranger?" it said softly. "Will you like to see a

"Stranger!" he repeated. The voice swoke old memories before the days of Private Richard Doubledick.

"A stranger now, but not a stranger once," It said in tones that thrilled him. "Richard, dear Richard, lost through so many years, my name"-He cried out her name, "Mary!" and she held him in her arms, and his head

"I am not breaking a rash vow, Richard. These are not Mary Marshall's She was married.

"I have another name, Richard. Did you ever hear it? "Never!"

He looked into her face, so pensively beautiful, and wondered at the smile upon it through her tears. "Think again, Richard. Are you sure

you never heard my altered name?" "Never!"

"Don't move your head to look at me, dear Richard. Let it lie here while I tell my story. I loved a generous, noble man, loved him with my whole heart, loved him for years and years, leved him faithfully, devotedly. loved him with no hope of return, loved him, knowing nothing of his highest qualities-not even knowing that he was alive. He was a brave soldier. He was honored and beloved by thousands of thousands, when the mother of his dear friend found me and showed me that in all his triumphs he had never forgotten me. He was wounded in a great battle. He was brought. dving, here into Brussels. I came to watch and tend him, as I would have joyfully gone with such a purpose to the dreariest ends of the earth. When he knew no one else he knew me. When he suffered most he bore his sufferings barely murmuring, content to rest his head where yours rests now. When he lay at the point of death he married me that he might call me wife before he died. And the name, my dear love, that I took on that forgotten night"-

"I know it now!" he sobbed. "The shadowy remembrance strengthens. It is come back. I thank heaven that my mind is quite restored! My Mary, kiss me. Lull this weary head to rest, or I shall die of gratitude. His parting words were fulfilled. I see home again!"

Well! They were happy. It was a long recovery, but they were happy through it all. The snow had melted on the ground and the birds were singing in the leafless thickets of the early spring when those three were first able to ride out together and when people flocked about the open carriage to cheer and congratulate Captain Richard Doubledick.

But even then it became necessary for the captain, instead of returning to England, to complete his recovery in the climate of southern France. They found a spot upon the Rhone, within a ride of the old town of Avignon and within view of its broken bridge, which was all they could desire. They lived there together six months, then returned to England. Mrs. Taunton, growing old after three years-though not so old as that her bright, dark eyes were dimmed-and remembering that her strength had been benefited by the change, resolved to go back for a year to those parts. So she went with a faithful servant, who had often carried her son in his arms, and she was to be rejoined and escorted home at the year's end by Captain Richard Double-

(as she called them now), and they to her. She went to the neighborhood of there, in their own chateau near the farmer's house she rented. she grew into intimacy with a family belonging to that part of France. The intimacy began in her often meeting among the vineyards a pretty child. a girl with a most compassionate heart. who was never tired of listening to the solitary English lady's stories of her poor son and the cruel wars. The family were as gentle as the child, and at length she came to know them so well that she accepted their invitation to pass the last month of her residence abroad under their roof. All this intelligence she wrote home, piecemeal as it came about, from time to time. and at last inclosed a polite note from the head of the chateau soliciting, on the occasion of his approaching mission to that neighborhood, the honor of the company of cet homme si justement celebre, M. le Capitaine Richard Doubledick.

Captain Doubledick, now a hardy, handsome man in the full vigor of life. broader across the chest and shoulders than he had ever been before, dispatchtent of country after three years of which the world had fallen. The corn was golden, not drenched in unnatural red: was bound in sheaves for food. not trodden underfoot by men in mortal fight. The smoke rose up from peaceful hearths, not blazing ruins. In softened spirit be reached the old chateau near Aix upon a deep blue evening. It was a large chateau of the genuine

old ghostly kind, with round towers and extinguishers and a high leaden roof and more windows than Aladdin's palace. The lattice blinds were all thrown open after the best of the day, and there were glimpses of rambling walls and corridors within. Then there were immense outbuildings fallen into partial decay. masses of dark trees, terrace gardens, balustrades, tanks of water too weak to play and too dirty to work, statues. weeds and thickets of iron railing that seemed to have overgrown themselves like the shrubberles and to have branched out in all manner of wild shapes. The entrance doors stood open, and the captain walked in.

He walked into a lofty stone hall, refreshingly cool and gloomy after the glare of the southern day's travel. Extending along the four sides of this hall was a gallery leading to suits of rooms, and it was lighted from the top. Still no bell was to be seen.

"Faith," said the captain halting. ashamed of the clanking of his boots.

'this is a ghostly beginning!" He started back and felt his face turn white. In the gallery looking down at him stood the French officerthe officer whose picture he had carried in his mind so long and so far. Compared with the remembered original at last-in every lineament how like it was! He moved and disappeared, and Cap-

tain Richard Doubledick heard his steps coming quickly down into the hall. He entered through an archway. There was a bright, sudden look upon his face, much such a look as it had worn in that fatal moment at Bada-M. le Capitaine Richard Double

dick? Enchanted to receive him! A thousand apologies! The servants were all out in the air. There was a little fete among them in the garden. In effect it was the fete day of my daugh ter, the little cherished and protected of Mme. Taunton.

He was so gracious and so frank that M. le Capitaine Richard Double dick could not withhold his hand. "It is the hand of a brave English man," said the French officer, retaining it while he spoke. "I could respect a brave Englishman even as my foe, how much more as my friend! I also am a soldier."

"He has not remembered me as I have remembered him. He did not take such note of my face that day as I took of his," thought Captain Richard Doubledick. "How shall I tel

The French officer conducted his guest into a garden and presented him to his wife, an engaging and beautiful woman, sitting with Mrs. Taunton in a whimsical old fashioned pavilion. His daughter, her fair young face beaming with joy, came running to embrace him, and there was a boy baby to tumble down among the orange trees on the broad steps in making for his father's legs. A multitude of children visitors were dancing to sprightly music, and all the servants and peasants about the chateau were dancing too. It was a scene of innocent happiness that might have been invented for the climax of the scenes of peace which had soothed the captain's journey.

He looked on, greatly troubled in his mind, until a resounding bell rang, and the French officer begged to show him his rooms. They went upstairs into the gallery from which the officer had looked down, and M. le Capitaine Rich ard Doubledick was cordially weicomed to a grand outer chamber and smaller one within, all clocks and draperies and hearths and brazen dogs and tiles and cool devices and elegance and vastness.

"You were at Waterloo?" said the French officer.

"I was." said Captain Richard Dou bledick. "And at Badajos." Left alone with the sound of his own stern voice in his ears, he sat down to consider. What shall I do and how shall I tell him? At that time unhappily many deplorable duels had been fought between English and French officers arising out of the recent war. and these duels and how to avoid this officer's hospitality were the upper most thought in Captain Richard Doubledick's mind.

He was thinking and letting the time run out in which he should have dressed for dinner when Mrs. Taunton spoke to him outside the door asking if he could give her the letter he had brought from Mary, "His mother, above all," the captain thought. "How

"You will form a friendship with your host, I hope." said Mrs. Taunton, whom be hurriedly admitted, "that will last for life. He is so true hearted and so generous. Richard, that you can hardly fail to esteem one another. If Saturday evening 7 to 8. he had been spared"-she kissed, not without tears, the locket in which she wore his halr-"he would have appreclated him with his own magnanimity and would have been truly happy that the evil days were past which made such a man his enemy."

She left the room, and the captain walked first to one window, whence he could see the dancing in the garden. then to another window, whence h could see the smiling prospect and the peaceful vineyards

"Spirit of my departed friend," said ed a courteous reply and followed it in he. "is it through thee these better person. Traveling through all that ex- thoughts are rising in my mind? Is it thou who hast shown me, all the way I peace, he blessed the better days on have been drawn to meet this man, the blessings of the altered time? Is it thou who hast sent thy stricken mother to me, to stay my angry hand? Is it from thee the whisper comes that this man did his duty as thou didstand as I did, through thy guidance. which has wholly saved me here on earth-and that he did no more?"

He sat down with his head buried in his hands and, when he rose up, made the second strong resolution of his life -that neither to the French officer not to the mother of his departed friend. nor to any soul, while either of the two was living, would be breathe what only he knew. And when he touched that French officer's glass with his own that day at dinner he secretly forgave him in the name of the Divine Forgiver of

injuries. The time has since come when the sor of Major Richard Doubledick and the son of that French officer, friends as their fathers were before them, fought side by side in one cause, with their respective nations, like long divided brothers whom the better times have brought together, fast united.

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